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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0368  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 1433  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0345  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 000336

SIPDIS

AF/W FOR DANA BANKS, NSC FOR KAREN O'DONNELL  
LONDON FOR PETER LORD, DAKAR FOR SABINUS ANAELE  
DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA CAROLYN HUGHES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT YAYI CONOVKES CHARGE TO ASK AGAIN FOR  
FOOD AID

REF: (A) BANKS - BOUSTANI EMAIL 06/11/2008 (B)

COTONOU 288 (C) COTONOU 262 (D) COTONOU 143

Classified By: CDA Martina Boustani for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) President Yayi convoked the Charge on June 12 to ask for a response to the two letters (Ref A and C) that he sent to President Bush requesting food assistance. Yayi repeatedly stated the close friendship he felt for President Bush and re-iterated that his messages were a "SOS" (Ref B) for food assistance. The Charge assured President Yayi that his letters had been transmitted to President Bush and a response would be forthcoming. The Charge urged President Yayi to work with his technical experts to develop a detailed request for assistance. The Charge and Poloff attended the meeting. Also in attendance was Mariam Diallo, Yayi's foreign affairs' advisor.

2.(C) In a twenty minute meeting President Yayi repeated his written requests for food aid and asked for a response to his letters to President Bush requesting aid. Referring to President Bush by his first name, he asked the Charge to convey his feelings of friendship to President Bush and request that President Bush send corn and rice to help Benin's poorest citizens. Yayi stressed that his government was working to encourage farmers to grow more foodstuffs but was in need of food aid over the short term. As an example of the situation that poor Beninese find themselves in, he stated that consumers asked Benin's National Food Aid and Security Office (ONASA) to sell subsidized corn in 500 gram increments instead of 1 kilogram bags because the 165 FCFA (\$0.40) a kilogram price was too expensive. Yayi also said Benin could not find enough seed and fertilizers at affordable prices to spur agricultural production.

3.(C) The Charge assured Yayi that his letters have been transmitted to President Bush. The Charge explained the USG's food aid programs and the procedures used to distribute food aid. The Charge suggested that President Yayi ask his technical experts to prepare a detailed analysis of Benin's food situation as a starting point for discussions of food aid. President Yayi ended the amiable meeting with a renewal of his previous invitation to President Bush, former President Bush, and former First Lady Barbara Bush, to visit Benin (Ref D).

4.(C) Comment. President Yayi's words and gestures during the meeting conveyed a genuine concern for the plight of the poorest of his people. Yayi very much wants a positive response to his letters to President Bush. American food aid would aid those Beninese experiencing difficulty as the

result of rising food prices and would buttress President Yayi's political standing. As he stated in the meeting he hopes the food aid would be known as "the rice that George sent to Boni". As stated in Ref B, ONASA identified a deficit of 50,000 tons of corn, 20,000 tons of rice, and 3,000 tons of beans. The projected deficits are difficult to use barring confirmation from outside experts. USAID Benin requested a visit by a regional USAID food expert to examine the food security issue in Benin but funding does not exist to support the visit. Until more information is forthcoming from the Government of Benin or outside experts can verify the necessity of President Yayi's requests for food aid it is difficult to determine if Benin risks a food crisis. End Comment.

BOUSTANI